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LETTERS TO A FRIEND,

ON SOME OF

The Primitive

DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY.

By JOHN WILBUR.

"FINALLY, BRETHREN, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT; IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE, AND IF THERE BE ANY PRAISE, THINK ON THESE THINGS."—*Philippians iv. 8.*

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PREFACE.

IN publishing the following Letters, it is necessary that I should briefly state some of the reasons which have induced me thus to give a more extended circulation to what was originally only a private communication of sentiment.

They contain the views of a friend who, during his visit and gospel labours in this land, was often led into deep exercise and solicitude on subjects of great interest and importance to our religious society. The views which he has taken, and the sentiments he has expressed, are, in my judgment, well calculated to afford instruction and profit; and to support the ancient doctrines and testimonies of our society; nor can I doubt but they will be acceptable to, and be well received by all who wish these doctrines and testimonies to be maintained in their ancient purity. Yet to others who may be shunning the cross, and the narrow way, and seeking for themselves and their children more liberty; endeavouring to combine what are altogether irreconcilable, the grandeur and friendships of this world with the plain and simple way of truth, I expect some of the sentiments contained in this work, will be very unpalatable.

A recurrence to our first principles is at all times profitable and advantageous; the present day abounds with writings, both of a religious nature and others, much mixed with opinions and sentiments very different from those held by us as a society; and whilst these books are extensively read amongst us, there is reason to fear that the perusal of them tends much to the exclusion of the writings of our own society; that thus loss is sustained by many of our members, who are more deficient, than they ought to be, in the knowledge of our principles on various important points: a more extended acquaintance with these principles, and a more strict adherence to the testimonies of the society, is much to be desired, and would be of great benefit.

The following Letters are calculated to impart such knowledge, and to promote such an adherence, and I publish them with the hope that these may be their effects—that they may be read with a desire to be instructed, and to profit by the sentiments they inculcate. The responsibility of giving them this publicity attaches not to the writer, but belongs exclusively to me.

GEORGE CROSFIELD.

LIVERPOOL,
10th MONTH, 1832.

LETTERS TO A FRIEND,

&c. &c.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have often recurred, with a degree of satisfaction to my early impressions, as well as to the instructions which were given me by my parents. They early made me acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity, so far as the reading of the Scriptures of Truth would give me that knowledge, and I was carefully instructed to reverence these sacred writings. The precepts of the New Testament in a particular manner, did seem fully to correspond with those secret sensations, which I was early led to believe were the openings and leadings of truth upon my mind: I was enabled also, without an expositor, to receive and satisfactorily to understand, some of the more prominent and simple doctrines of the gospel, as to the character and the several offices of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world.

And now also in due time, the history of the Society of Friends was introduced to my reading and observation; and my youthful mind was thereby strengthened and confirmed, to make a more perfect discrimination between the works of the law and those of faith; and

to perceive what faith in God, and in the Lord Jesus Christ would do, even that faith which worketh by love to the purifying of the heart. I saw that it was sufficient ; that it enabled those sons of the morning of our day, notwithstanding the mighty opposition which lay in their way, to work the works of God ; even those spiritual works which were wrought in them, and by them, through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, in the covenant of God's promise unto them ; even in like manner as the primitive Christians did, they joined and worked with the workings of grace in themselves to the glory of God and to the praise of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now I found myself to be one of this society, not by birth and education only, but I embraced, and received, and fully believed in the doctrines of Christianity as professed by it, and I have ever since loved the society and its testimonies wherever they have been planted ; not only in my native land of America, but also in this nation, where this the Lord's right hand planting was, as regards our society, first begun.

Seeing now that my lot has been cast amongst my friends here, in the love and service of the gospel, I have verily thought that the good of this people has come nearer to my best desires and feelings than ever it did before, and that for this reason, that this dedication has cost me more than any other service in which I have been engaged ; and many, yea very many in this land, have become as bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh ; if indeed I may be allowed to use and to spiritualize the expression ; they have become as brothers and sisters in those tender feelings which I trust spring from the one blessed source of Divine love ; so that though as an alien and a stranger here, as to the outward, still I feel to be

one of you, and in my measure, to joy in your joys and grieve in your griefs—to travail in affliction with you, and in desire that you may faint not :—to endeavour to strengthen the hands which hang down with weakness, or rather to put up a prayer that our best helper may lift them up, that he may confirm the feeble knees ; and that all who have taken upon them the profession, may be encouraged to stand fast in the Lord, and faithfully in the testimonies of our God ; so that this people, whom in his own good pleasure he chose to raise up and advance, distinct from all others of this day, to be as a beacon, a light, and a way-mark outwardly in the world, may hold on their way, and continue faithful through His power to support and maintain the inestimable ground to which God did lead them, and gave them to stand upon : and that they may never suffer any by-way apprehension of good to draw their attention from the one great object of God's peculiar design in raising them up to be a people, even to bear testimony to the spiritual nature and design of the gospel, as well as to uphold the glorious plan of redemption in all its other parts.

In whatever degree the present condition of the Christian world may now be improved by what has been done through this people, yet if by means of their unfaithfulness, a re-action should take place and continue, we may fear that when this people shall again have mingled with those from whom they came out, and the advanced ground of God's providence be thus vacated, that the religious testimonies given them to bear, will also be lost with them. Should such an event occur, then indeed will it be better for mankind coming after, that this society had never existed, for the enemy of all good, will not then fail to suggest that the ground

having been once taken and found to be untenable, it would be vain and fruitless for any to attempt the like again: for we know, that the more efficient the means that may have been resorted to, to attain an object, if those means fail, the more we despair of ever attaining that object. But Oh ! that the spirit and power of the gospel may never give place to profession and form, however garnished and glowing that form or profession may appear.

And now my dear friend, my mind having been much exercised under divers weighty and important considerations of this nature since I have been in this land, I am induced to believe, it will contribute to my peace of mind, to open a little and spread forth before thee, a few remarks upon those subjects which have been more prominently and peculiarly exercising to my mind, during my labours amongst you ; but I have no hope of being able to do justice to a review of so important a nature as may seem to be premised, but only in such a way as I can endeavour to discharge what I apprehend to be my duty ; I propose therefore, in my succeeding letters, to treat upon some points arising out of the foregoing considerations.

LETTER II.

ON THE FALL OF MAN, AND ON CHRISTIAN
REDEMPTION.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If it be, as has been affirmed, that enmity took root in some of the heavenly company, and that they through pride were led into rebellion, and an attempt to set up and establish a kingdom for themselves in opposition to, and above the throne and kingdom of God; still we have no reason to believe that the needful and mighty act of God in expelling from the regions of light their arch leader with all his band, had, or could have, any effect as a reconciliation, or any tendency to remove the enmity, however humbling their defeat and condition. No, nor that it were possible for those who had been created free partakers with their blessed and eternal King in the riches of his glory, after such daring rebellion and attempted usurpation, could ever be restored to that glorious state which they had lost by their fall;* for, as we may well believe, no mediation could be found between these rebels and Him whom they had attempted to dethrone: they had sinned wilfully and without temptation, and there

*“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance. HEB. vi. v. 4, 5 & 6.—also HEB. x. v. 26.

remained therefore to them no more sacrifice for sins, but they were consigned to the blackness of darkness for ever.*

Hence this arch-pretender finding himself forever defeated by the power and interminable decree of God, was excited to the highest pitch of hatred and malice, and seeing he was now forever expelled from the glories above, would seek to obtain for himself some other place and kingdom where to rule. He therefore, as it would appear, then sought out, and by his subtle temptation, assailed the lower creation of God, that he might hereby establish his dominion over a noble race which God had here placed, newly created by his Divine hand, in his own image, "a little lower than the angels," and furnished too with power from his almighty Creator, if he had been obedient, to resist and overcome this proud usurper of the prerogative of heaven; but he, the wicked one (for such he had now become) by deceit and lies, and by a proud contradiction of the law and commandments of God, attempted to turn away man

* "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." **MATT. xxv. v. 41.**

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." **2 PETER ii. v. 4.**

"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness." **JUDE v. 6.**

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." **REVELATIONS xii. v. 7, 8, & 9.**

from his allegiance to his beneficent Maker and Father, and to corrupt and to obliterate the character and image of uprightness and holiness which God had impressed upon him ; and instead thereof to stamp him with the mark and inscription of the beast, which is sin, and serves to show to whose kingdom he belongs.

In this the serpent succeeded but too well, and man, through pride, and listening to the tempter, and seeking to obtain knowledge beyond what his Creator had assigned to him, fell into a mighty lapse of transgression, and was estranged from his Maker ; the threatened penalty of his disobedience was inflicted upon him, and his condition was properly denominated death, than which, if it remain, there can be no greater punishment ; and this death was truly realized, inasmuch as he died spiritually by losing the Divine life through his transgression. He was dead also as it regards a sense of goodness ; for his feelings were now so perverted, that they led him to consider God, who was truly his all beneficent Father, to be his enemy ; he himself having now become the subject of another kingdom.

As things now were, it remained entirely with God, whether he would provide a way for man to return again to his rightful allegiance, so that the first purpose of his own benevolence and glory might still be realized ; or whether he would abandon this ruined work altogether. But rejoice, O heavens ! and sing O earth ! and break forth into singing O ye mountains of the forest ! love, boundless love, and mercy led the way, and if a plan could be found compatible with both the blessed attributes of justice and mercy, so that his statutes should not be rescinded nor dishonoured, then God would open a way for them to return to himself again. And joyful to think and to know, in the richness of his grace a

way was found, and a Mediator was also found and ordained who would for this, even for this fallen creature give life for life. For however man had conceived pride, through the instilling of the author of it, and had a desire to be wise in himself, and to be as God, yet he had not rebelled as the fallen angels had done; hence a provision could be made and adapted to remove out of this way that which had befallen him; and this provision should apply to him, on condition that he would then by obedience reverse his disobedience, for when the sacrifice for sin repented of, was in that day ordained, the Lord said then unto man "*if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted.*"

: But as it regarded the character and office of the Mediator, it was seen that he must also be a man; as it was man that sinned, so like must be given for like, and life for life, yea and death for death. That is, the death of a man temporally (God's leniency being such,) should be accepted as an equivalent pledge for the death of a man spiritually, he being yet within the reach of such a pledge, not having sinned as those had sinned, who had fallen before him; and so, by a pledge, should man be redeemed from the judgment of death that rested upon him.

But as sin could not be atoned by sin, any more than disobedience could be atoned by disobedience, or by an impure offering; and as the subsequent race of man, if a race should be suffered, must descend through these sin-stained progenitors; therefore the offering of a mere man yet unredeemed, could not be equivalent to the effecting of redemption; and as no mere man therefore, could be an equivalent pledge without first having a pledge; nor even then, so long as the nature and propensity to sin remained in him; so therefore no one

could be found among men merely as such, that could possibly redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him.

There were also other, and still higher and greater reasons, why a mere man could not be a sufficient mediator, because in the covenant of such a redemption as this must be to succeed to salvation, there must be a bringing to repentance, before the sins which had been committed could be forgiven or atoned for. And then again, and which is indispensable and cannot be commuted, man's heart must be enlightened, drawn and guided to the truth and to righteousness; for although he repent and his sins be remitted for once, yet without something to keep him from a recurrence to them, he will still sin, and never forsake the commission of it. For however he may know his former sins expiated by the atonement, still if he witness not the interposition of a power to preserve him in future from sin, he will go on again, adding sin to sin, until the accumulation become such, and the duration of his transgressions so outlive the day of God's grace, that the application of the mediation, whether without or within, will be rendered entirely unavailing. And here we see the supreme excellency of the light and grace of this provision; that if observed, is able to keep us from a state, out of which the atonement itself is not designed to redeem us—even that of sinning against the Holy Ghost. (See HEB. vi. v. 4, 5, 6, and chap. x. v. 26.)

If the offering of a mere man could have been given and accepted for sins already passed, still this could have no effect in keeping man from sinning in future. But still the interposition and mediation must be effected, as wisdom teacheth us to believe, by the seed of the woman, even by the man Christ Jesus, who should know no

sin, and in whom the fulness of God should dwell bodily, and this body and life of man in which he designed himself to dwell, should be a pure offering and sacrifice of the first fruits, even of the first and only man who never sinned. This was therefore a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour unto God, in which, and by which, he would blot out from his presence the transgression of every penitent sinner, and obtain a place and ground for him, whereon he would deign to meet him; and such too as would enable him to receive the divine grace, and prepare him for the guidance of the divine Spirit: for without this, man could not so much as be brought to repentance, and much less, to that which is the hardest of all attainments; the forsaking and ceasing from sin; for the mediation as well as the mediator was to be the Immanuel, God with us; not only God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto himself, but also God in them through a measure of his spirit, as was declared, "thou in me and I in them!"

And we have not only abundant Scripture testimony, to show the fitness and necessity of a mediator, to act in us, and with us, as well as without us, and for us: but our own inability alone to do any thing that is good, clearly teacheth us the high order and urgent necessity of a spiritual and continual mediation to guide and preserve us. Herein is much of the excellency of the mediation seen, that after the expiation of repented sins, He the Mediator of the whole glorious covenant of life and salvation, is to us a mediator still, keeping with us, and constantly teaching us the denying of all ungodliness: for such is our weakness, even after remission, that but for his help continually, we should soon fall into our old sins again, and our last state would be worse than the first. So that in the end Christ may have died

for us a thousand times, (if by his judgments we should be so many times brought to repentance) and still we be continually growing worse and worse; yea, and though we might all the time be acknowledging the atonement, and having the most implicit confidence in it, still if we do not believe in him, and receive him, the promise of the Father, the Immanuel to be with us, to keep us, all will be in vain. Yea, and if we do not by the power of the agency which God giveth us, work with him, and endeavour to keep his commandments, then the covenant to us is broken; yea, and *by us* is also broken; and moreover, if this indispensable part of the covenant so clearly identified and enforced by the undeniable authority of the Scriptures, is disregarded or rejected, however clear and full our faith may be in another indispensable part, still we are covenant breakers, and but partial believers in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And again, on the other side: if any man, with the Bible in his hand, shall deny the divinity of Christ, and the efficacy and necessity of his outward sacrifice, then all his professions of light or grace, or spirit, (if indeed he have the presumption to make such a profession) will be but a mere *ignis fatuus*, or a counterfeit of the right thing, and will only contribute to his condemnation.

Now if by the suggestion of an evil spirit the fall of man was effected through *disobedience*, then are we not to conclude, that through the interposition of a good spirit, the restoration is to be effected in the reverse of that by which man fell; even in obedience? And obedience is not a whit less necessary on account of what has gone before it in order to make way for it; for what Christ has done for us without us, has not rescinded a single obligation for us,—has not in the least exonerated

us from obedience, or from fulfilling as much of the conditions as devolves upon us. In every covenant there is either a promise, an obligation, or a condition, between two at least ; thus in that between God and us, after the first step which he himself has taken, to make way for all his promises, as well as even the application of the atonement, it is upon the condition of our obedience and fulfilment of our part of that covenant, which ensures to us an eternal inheritance.

Christianity having been ordained as the blessed means of restoring man from his fallen condition and from sin, to a state of holiness and acceptance with God, is of all things the most hateful to the devil ; yea, he hateth the faith and the power as well as the author of it. He strove mightily to destroy the child Jesus, through the instrumentality of Herod, so that if possible he might frustrate and prevent his glorious mission amongst men ; so likewise it is to be presumed that he unwittingly strove, through the chief priests and elders, to apprehend and bring him before Pilate and Herod that they might destroy him, not knowing at the time, that therein he was fighting against his own kingdom ; for however cunning, yet he is not infinite in understanding, nor can he know beforehand the divine purposes. For although the coming of Christ, and his character as the Messiah, were so clearly spoken of, that doubtless, he as well as the children of men, were in expectation of it ; yet the benefit of his death and sufferings, were described in so mysterious and hidden a manner, that even the most enlightened of men could not comprehend it until after his resurrection, when he himself clearly explained it to two of his disciples as they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, as well as at other times. Thus the enmity and malice of the devil led him ignorantly on to in-

stigate the Jews to destroy the man Jesus, not knowing, as we may well believe, the satisfactory and saving purpose of the death of Christ.

The plan of our salvation and redemption then, on the part of Divine Providence, consists of three things:—1st. Repentance, or rather his power that leads to it. 2nd. The atoning blood of Christ: and 3rd. His Holy Spirit which sanctifies; and this agrees with the apostle John's testimony that there are three that bear witness in the earth, viz. "the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three agree in one." For we are instructed, that the water of Jordan administered upon the body of Jesus, and upon the bodies of men, represented repentance, and showed, and was thus acknowledged by Jesus himself, that judgment which brings to repentance cometh first; after this, the blood of Christ shed at Calvary as an atonement and reconciliation for us, cometh in the second place; and the gift of the Holy Spirit for our guidance and sanctification comes in the third place; and this order of time, and their succession to each other, was arranged by wisdom itself; for as the baptism of John, signifying repentance, took place first; so the offering of Christ, for the expiation of sins thus repented of, came next in succession; and lastly, the more full diffusion of the Holy Spirit followed for the accomplishment and completion of the work of sanctification; and as to the two former, their order is sufficiently proved by the times of those events; and as to the latter, its place is clearly demonstrated by the direction of truth and the nature of things, see John vii. v. 37, "For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." But after his death and resurrection, "he breathed on them, and bade them receive the Holy Ghost, which is the

eternal spirit that sanctifies men's hearts." John xx. v. 22, 23.

There are divers operations and effects of the Spirit distinctly spoken of in the scriptures of truth, as being effectual to salvation, and they are severally alluded to by Christ and his apostles, as well as by the holy men of old, in such manner as if each was saving of itself; and for the reason, as I apprehend, that not one of these requisites, all of which are indispensable to our future well being, should be overlooked or excluded from the summary of our faith in the covenant of life and peace. And these provisions and conditions may be thus enumerated :—

1st. That men are to be saved by the outward coming, sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, through whom their souls are reconciled unto God.

2nd. That men are to be saved by faith in God, and in his Son Jesus Christ.

3rd. That men are to be saved by regeneration and baptism of the Spirit.

4th. That men are to be saved by Divine Grace.

5th. That men are to be saved by the Spirit of Christ or of God.

6th. That men are to be saved by the knowledge of God.

7th. That men are to be saved by obeying and keeping the commandments of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To exemplify and demonstrate the foregoing positions, I would refer to the subjoined passages of Scripture, as being distinctly applicable to them, and which, collectively, would seem to constitute and include the whole

covenant of life and salvation.* And I would desire to ask every one who is looking for the blessed hope of

* "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, &c. JOHN c. iii. v. 16.—We have redemption through his blood. EPH. c. i. v. 7.—Who gave himself for us, &c. TITUS c. ii. v. 14.—And washed us from our sins in his own blood. REV. c. i. v. 5.

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, &c. JOHN c. xi. v. 26.—For ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. GAL. c. iii. v. 26.

"He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, &c. MATT. c. iii. v. 11, 12.—Except a man be born again, &c. JOHN c. iii. v. 3.—Baptism doth also now save us, &c. 1 PETER c. iii. v. 21.

"But by the grace of God, I am what I am, &c. 1 COR. c. xv. v. 10.—My grace is sufficient for thee, &c. 2 COR. c. xii. v. 9.—For by grace are ye saved through faith. EPH. c. ii. v. 5.—For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. TIT. c. ii. v. 11.

"And His Spirit, it hath gathered them. ISA. c. xxxiv. v. 16.—It is the Spirit that quickeneth, &c. JOHN c. vii. v. 63.—For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, &c. ROM. c. viii. v. 8.—But he that soweth to the Spirit, &c. GAL. c. vi. v. 8.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, &c. JOHN c. xvii. v. 3.

"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted. GEN. iv. 7.

"Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you. JEREM. c. vii. v. 23.

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. HEB. c. v. v. 9.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. JOHN viii. v. 51.

"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. 2 COR. c. x. v. 5.

"Fear God, and keep his commandments, &c. ECCLES. c. xii. v. 13.—And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments, &c. 1 JOHN c. iii. v. 22.—He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 JOHN c. ii. v. 4.—He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. 1 JOHN c. ii. v. 24.—And this is love, that we walk after his commandments, &c. 2 JOHN v. 6."

this high calling, even the glory of salvation, whether he can venture, even secretly in his own soul to disregard, or openly to disavow any one of the above conditions of his eternal salvation? And whether on serious reflection, he would not be fearful of doing so at the great risk of his soul's happiness? Then how needful it is to have a full belief in the doctrines of Scripture, and in every part of them; not merely assenting to some and passing slightly over others, for fear that a practical and living belief in them should lead us to much pain and conflict of spirit, and to the mortifying of the will of the flesh.—Then let every one come down and prove himself, and examine by the light of Christ, all the hidden and dark avenues of his heart, remembering that every secret thing must be opened and brought to judgment in the day of Jesus Christ. And Oh, how desirable, that when that day shall come upon every one of us, we may submit to it, while there is yet tenderness in our hearts, so that a spirit of unbelief in any one of these great doctrines of life and salvation may never be entertained; that none of the great truths of the gospel may be looked upon with indifference, but that every one of us may be so quickened and made alive unto God, by the resurrection and power of Jesus Christ, as to be furnished and blessed with the perceptive and all instructive guidance and influence of his Holy Spirit.

LETTER III.

THE EFFECT OF ACTION AND RE-ACTION UPON THE
PROFESSORS OF CHRISTIANITY, ESPECIALLY IN
RELATION TO THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We learn from history, that whenever God in his providence has made way for an advance of his church and people, their old enemy and watchful foe, has then always been ready to exercise all his manœuvres and powers to drive her back again into the wilderness, and we have no need to go further back than the Protestant reformation for a proof of it; for in a review of those times, we easily recognize his palpable and bestirring efforts to frustrate the blessed work, and to tarnish the beauty that seemed to be dawning upon the church, and, if possible, to deter her from going forward in the way which God had opened before her, even to the advanced ground which he had provided for the pitching of her tents and tabernacles. Thus when the early reformers began to see the errors and inconsistencies of the Romish Church; the evil effects of their outward forms and observances could not but greatly strike their attention, and particularly their doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in what was called the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; the whole, and particularly the latter, tending to a denial of the spirituality of religion, and the benefit of the offering once made for all, by the sufferings of

Jesus Christ without the gates of Jerusalem. The errors of Socinus were also propagated about this time, and his followers were thus in reality associated with the Romish Church in effecting the same object, though by different means, and seemed to threaten the overthrow and downfall of the whole doctrine of Christian redemption.—The earnest efforts of the honest hearted and sincere reformers urgently opposed both these evils, and the Romish Church, defending in a very undue manner the doctrine of works, the abuse of which was the foundation of their system of priestcraft, the enemy of all good, took advantage of the heat of this controversy, and through a want of watchfulness and care on the part of the first reformers, they were led on, step by step, to such a warm defence of the doctrine of the atonement, as to lose sight of the more practical operation of the light, grace, and spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this gained such ground at a later period, during the hot disputes between the Calvinistic Puritans and the Protestant Episcopacy, which retained many of the Romish superstitions and errors, and they were so exclusively and intently fixed on extolling the merits of the former, that they very much lost sight of the necessity of the latter; and so by inattention to it, their experience in, and faith concerning the power of practical religion, gradually diminished and vanished away; insomuch that finally they became so void and faithless of the spirit and life of religion, that he who made a profession of spirituality, became as it were, a by-word and a hissing to these great and zealous supporters of the ever blessed atonement. Yea, and those who worshipped God in spirit, who walked in his light, and believed in the perceptible guidance and influence of his holy spirit, were deemed mystics and enthusiasts;

and now having lost the life and the power, the faith of these high professors generally was only literal, and their devotions an imitation, consisting of forms and ceremonies, and things that belonged to the outward law. Thus they in their turn, as the others in another way had done, made a breach in the same covenant or system of Christianity, and rejected very much of the vital and spiritual part, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

This, we may well suppose, was effected by the action and re-action of that zeal of an unregenerate heart which leads to errors and extremes. But God, even her God, forsook not his church. He interposed to renew his whole covenant with her, notwithstanding her wavering and vibrations from the true centre, the power of the gospel! He would lead her again out of the wilderness where her enemy had driven her, and he would speak comfortably to her. He would raise up unto her, faithful witnesses whose hearts he would enlarge, that they should understand, and whose eyes he would anoint that they should see, and he would restore again to the church the whole covenant entire as in primitive times, and men should be able again to see equally every provision of his salvation.

And they, our predecessors, did see and did walk in the light of the Lord Jesus, in which every one who walketh also believeth, and they do ever believe the whole covenant of God, and their faith will be found in all that faith can do, and their works in all that works can do. And they see that such faith as stands only in literal things, and is not also in the light, and life, and power, is dead, being but partial and alone; and in proportion as is the increase of faith, so is the increase of works; and so vice versa, as regards a living faith, and those works which are with it, which are the fruits

of the Spirit of God. For such a faith, according to the declaration of the apostle, is also the fruit of the same spirit, so that he who hath not the Spirit of Christ, nor walketh by it, cannot have the faith as it is in Jesus.

But the coming forth of George Fox, and his coteremporaries, for the restoration of God's covenant, as well as the primitive testimonies and doctrines of the gospel, drew upon them the malice and rage of the old watchful foe; for the advancement of the church, by the redeeming power of God through Jesus Christ, still excited the most dire hatred of her enemy, the devil, whose malice, as it did in the early days of the Christian church, now again instigated and poured forth a mighty volume of rage and persecution against them, hoping no doubt to get to himself some honour over the church of God. For inasmuch as in the primitive times he was able to persecute the Christian church, only by and through the people of the world, so now he hoped to divide Christ's kingdom against itself, and if not to the overthrow of all—yet to the dividing of the spoil, and himself to share in it, by arraying Christian against Christian, catholic against protestant, and finally, even protestant Christians against each other. Now it was seen that even those who were making the highest profession of the atoning blood of their Redeemer, and who were placing the most implicit reliance and confidence therein, could be brought forward in the very face of the gospel, to spoil and devour the professors of the same faith; for this plain reason only, that they, the latter, were endeavouring to embrace and observe all the commands and doctrines of their lord and master Jesus Christ. They had made a firm stand and notable advancement against the king-

dom of darkness, therefore the prince of darkness now rose in his fury and spread the work of cruelty around, increasingly striving to waste and paralyze this people. But this advanced guard—this little band of humble warriors, fighting under the strong banner of Christ Jesus, their holy head and leader, were invincible, because their captain was with them, and went before them ; and for this reason, that their weapons were not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down the strong-holds of satan and his armies.

I shall now proceed to make some remarks upon Socinianism and infidelity, subsequent to the rise of the Society of Friends, and on the introduction of these opinions among them, and among other Christian professors. If inquiry were to be made for the first cause of these modern deviations from the soundness of Christian faith, we might easily trace it to the same source whence evil first came into the world, and whence we are to look for the primary origin of all iniquity ; and if we were to seek for the grounds on which that first cause of evil acts on our fallen nature, our inquiries must end in the conviction, that it rests in a disposition for insubordination to the needful restraints of the divine law, and on pride, that great upholder of self, and of the will of the flesh. These are the elements, in the absence of the humbling power of truth, with which the enemy pitches his strong-holds and builds his embattlements, even in the unrestrained will of man, and in the pride of his heart ; a pride which may not be seen on his person, but which either his words or his actions, sooner or later, will show to have a dwelling in his heart. Hence he will in a greater or less degree stand opposed to the pure, humbling, and needful restraints of the gospel ; in some way or other this will

be found, and to such a degree at least, as will keep him under the dominion of evil. But the outgoings by which the tempter leads man off from the ways of truth, are varied according to his natural disposition; according too to the traditions received, and the condition and faith of the society with which he is connected, and of those deviations which lead from the truth, the enemy, although he regards the least, still glories most in the worst and widest; and although high professing hypocrisy cannot be deemed the least of these, yet open infidelity must be acknowledged the greatest; still it is believed, that the ready foe has made the former a clue to the latter, and however natural it is for things to produce their like, yet we find that through the interposition of an evil agent, the natural order may be broken and reversed, and a thing may lead to another widely differing in its degree, and in some respects in its nature, yet in denomination the same. As one extreme often produces another, so may the abhorrence of one evil lead the unwary mind into its opposite evil; and although, in some dispositions, over action may subside into inaction, yet it undoubtedly often does produce re-action; and as it regards spiritual agency, where the power of truth is not the moving principle, then there is another power which influences and controls men's actions, and controls that which lends to action, viz. their faith, or rather their notions or way of thinking; for indeed if they are not in some degree under the influence of the truth, let their profession be what it may, they can have nothing which deserves the name of faith. For when men forsake the power of truth, this choice gift is continued to them no longer, they then have not its renewing assurances, they are trusting in a false hope, which is nothing more than the spurious workings

of the deceiver. The vanity and pride of ascribing to man the honour of saving himself by his own good works, as is done by those who rely for salvation on works alone, has been eagerly grasped by the devil; and at the same time that he extols it to 'ts devotees, he exhibits it in the most ridiculous point of view to all such, as seeing its inconsistencies, are led into the Calvinistic sentiment which excludes good works altogether, causing them to confide exclusively in Christ's outward atonement for them, and in this way the enemy takes advantage of man's frailty; still charity leads us to the persuasion that sincerity may exist in the one as well as in the other, but practical observation obliges us also to admit, that a complete character of hypocrisy may be found in both.

Again, where good works or obedience are struck altogether from the account, and God believed to be equal in all his ways, and implicit confidence being placed on Christ's redemption without us, then comes in the doctrine of universal salvation without any condition. In all these forms of belief we can plainly see the care taken to provide an escape from the pain and conflict of the sanctifying and practical work of the grace and spirit of God upon men's souls for their purification, so that a place may be found and abode in, for the continued indulgence of the flesh; and the will of man, vainly attempted to be kept alive in every form of religion, save the one true form in which obedience and the power of the spirit dwelleth. It must be acknowledged then, that the mind let out to mere opinions, without the living, fundamental, and true touchstone of the light and grace of God, confirmed by the Scriptures, will probably run into great errors; and so it seems many, very many, have run. But the

devil has not led every one in the same way, though he may bring them to the same bitter end at last,—for there are many paths which lead through devious windings, but all come out at the same sad point. He may induce both professors and non-professors, (the freedom of the gospel is not apparent in one, nor its fruits in the other) to disbelieve the spirituality of Christianity, because they see their neighbour, who is high in the profession of it, either a mere enthusiast or a hypocrite. Again, he may induce some men to disbelieve in the atonement of Jesus Christ, because many who lay great stress upon it, are in their practice no better than infidels. Furthermore, he may induce many to condemn Christianity under every name and form, because they see those who profess to believe in, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour, continue to pursue this world, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, with great avidity, like other men.

But after all, whatever the inducement may appear to be, or whatever may be seen in others inclining thereto, the strongest ground of unbelief is in a man's own heart, and in the utter want, or loss of true religion there. To such as are inclined to reasoning, satan is fully able, successfully to pervert and misrepresent the doctrines of the Gospel, because when their minds are darkened and know not the truth, he can and does lead them to mistake his false radiance for the light of Christ, and thereby induces a great reversion of views and sentiments, making light darkness, and darkness light, before them. Hence they become an easy prey to infidelity. In this way I apprehend it was that some were seduced in the early days of our society, even such as had more self love and spiritual pride, than vital Christianity, to wit, John Perrott, John Wilkinson, and others. (See Sewell's and Gough's Histories.)

But we see how soon their antichristian doctrines were discerned and detected by George Fox and his cotemporaries, because the light and spirit of Christianity abode in them; even a measure of that spirit which trieth every spirit, and is able to decide whether it be of God or not. The judgment of truth was thus placed upon the heads of these innovators and great pretenders to spirituality. And again, in more modern times, it was in the self-same way, that satan deceived and led away some in Ireland, and many in North America; and it is believed that the facility of his victory over them, was greatly owing to their self love, self righteousness, and their great want of meek Christian principle. Insomuch that by his transforming power, he succeeded in bringing them to suppose, or to profess that they supposed, that our first friends did not believe in the true divinity and reconciling sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ; than which a greater absurdity, and perversion of things, could hardly be imagined. For however the views of others as to the spirituality of religion, were such as necessarily to lead our early friends to dwell much upon that part of the Christian doctrine, and to insist on the leading of God's grace in the heart; yet there is nothing more obviously foreign to the truth than the pretensions of those Socinian seceders, viz. that our first friends did not believe in the true godhead and manhood of Jesus Christ, and in the blessed purpose of his sacrifice. So that we verily know that these outbreakings, cannot in the least degree be grounded upon any defect in our predecessors, in any point of Christian faith concerning the offices and character of Christ; for abundant evidence is deducible from their writings to prove that such a defect did not exist.

As has been before suggested, the professors of

Christianity in the time of George Fox had generally forsaken the spirituality of religion, but were not in the least wanting as to a belief in the outward coming, the divinity, and sacrifice of Christ. Hence there was not that necessity of insisting upon faith in this last mentioned part of the Covenant, respecting which there was no defect of faith, as upon that part in which there was a deficiency; and this their practice was according to truth and sound reasoning. For what skilful physician, being called to administer to a diseased person, would not resort to such medicine, as would tend to counteract the complaint that was already upon him, rather than to administer to a disease under which he did not suffer, and in which respect he was entirely sound and healthy. Now, as the literal and spiritual parts of Christianity cannot be considered by any truly enlightened mind to be opposing or contending properties, any more than the body and soul of a perfect man, so therefore there can be no necessary fear, that to promote the right apprehension of the one could endanger the safety of the other. To say that except a man has the spirit of Christ he is none of his, does not gainsay the testimony that "God was manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory!" and I believe that the more true spiritual Christianity a man has, the better he will be qualified rightly to see and to estimate the doctrines of truth as contained in the Holy Scriptures relative to the outward coming and offices of Jesus Christ; and for this very reason I believe, and am abundantly convinced, that our predecessors had much more of the true faith, and had much clearer views of the meaning and standing of the Scriptures, as well as of the true divinity of, and the purposes of the sufferings of our Lord and Saviour, than other professors of that

day, who were making a high profession of their faith in them, but many of whom were wanting in spiritual and vital religion.

LETTER IV.

ON THE SECESSION IN AMERICA.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IT has been supposed by some, that within the last century, there had been either a defect in the faith of the Society of Friends, as to the outward coming and atonement of Jesus Christ ; or otherwise not enough of care taken by its ministers to lay sufficient stress upon, or to allude sufficiently to the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ without us, so as by that means to keep up a safe barrier against the inroads of infidelity. I think the latter was the case with too many in America, and I make no doubt that if Friends had been timely aware of what might come, and what did afterwards come, they would have been better guarded against it. But I know not that there was any unsoundness in our society there, until the seeds were sown in the mind of him who stood at the head of the late secession, excepting only in a very few solitary individuals. Nor do I think that the open infidel writings of Paine, nearly half a century ago, had any effect in shaking the faith of Friends ; for, as far as my knowledge extends, these writings were justly deprecated by them, and treated every where with the abhorrence they justly merited ;

but whether the publications of Paine, or the more artful and refined writings of Priestly, contained the seed, which first fell on the fitly prepared ground : to wit, the heart of the first founder of the American secession, I am not prepared to determine ; but through whatever medium, or whether only through the agency of satan, it seems that either by a lapse into spiritual pride, or by some other means, his heart was exceedingly congenial to its growth, and his natural talent and manner were wonderfully calculated to supplant truth unobserved ; as well as for the first spreading the seeds of infidelity. It seems however that there were a few prominent characters about the same time, or soon after, who were prepared to receive from this their leader those seeds of infidelity. Hence through him and them (men of great influence,) awful devastation was made in the society of Friends in America ; and however the Socinian doctrine may have lamentably spread far and wide both in Europe and America, still I apprehend that so great a schism or devastation in proportion to numbers, has not been known elsewhere, as in the instance just mentioned. Here then a question may arise, whether the society of Friends, from its peculiar tenets, or discipline, is more exposed to the influence of such doctrines, than other branches of the Christian church. To this it may be replied with much confidence, that the plain, full, and true doctrines of Friends are not more nearly allied to Socinianism than are those of others. No ! and if indeed the doctrines of this society are the genuine doctrines of primitive Christianity, which we do most surely believe, then are they farther from infidelity than any others.

Nevertheless there is no doubt at all that the devil envies those most who are the most purely Christian,

and consequently presses them the most sorely with his temptations, and strives the hardest to ensnare and drive them back from their advanced ground ; and upon this principle we are led to believe that the temptations wherewith he tempted the author of Christianity, were greater than those whereby he has ever tempted men. By the same rule he exerts his power more against good men than against others, and besides, the more good he can despoil and overcome, the greater his victory and exultation. But however greater the trials of those who stand high in the scale of profession may be, still if it be a profession to which God hath called them, their dwelling being “in the secret place of the Most High,” they “shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty,”—and their strength and their protection will certainly be equal to the trials of their day ; hence as their feet abide upon the watch tower, their habitation will be kept in safety. But a mere profession of Christianity is altogether as unavailing in a Quaker as in any other. Yet as it regards the extent of that dereliction of principle which befel so many professing with Friends in America, however they may still profess to be Christians, yet every one acquainted with their scepticism, cannot but fear that they or their leaders have so far abandoned Christianity as to forfeit their right of benefit in the outward coming and propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and consequently their right in the whole covenant ; as all depends upon that blessed sacrifice. But it would seem as if the devil did make a kind of compromise with them, and such too as he had made with none other than professed Quakers, for as their principles lead them to believe in the light, grace and spirit of Christianity, as a distinguishing article, it would seem that he despaired of so managing with them, as to

strike this off at once with the other important part of the great plan, he therefore suffered them still to profess the spiritual guidance (which nevertheless if real, there is nothing that he hates worse,) well knowing that if he could induce a flat denial of the proper divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ without them, that they would not then, in the very nature of things, be sharers in the true light of Christ within them, and walk in it: so that he could now deceive them with his false radiance, which they should mistake for the real light. For having denied "the Lord that bought them," they could not be enlightened by him. Now, according to their manner of thinking and reading too, as they would of course be looking for light and spirit to guide them, full opportunity presented for this false light of the fallen angels, and the true light being thus superseded by darkness, through unbelief and hardness of heart, there was no power in them to distinguish between the true and the false; between Christ and antichrist; hence antichrist took the lead, and his light and his spirit became their guide! he, well pleased enough with it, and with their cry, which was a continual reiteration of "the light! the light! the spirit! the spirit!"—and Christ within but *not without!* yea, and proud and vaunting enough is he, to have wrested from Christ his name! and to obtain from the children of men the honour and homage attached to their leader! glorying too in his own power of transformation and delusion, in making himself as God and sitting as God!—Now in this we see his cloven foot again, and his twofold and cunning intention in pushing forward these infidel and deluded professors to the cry of "the spirit of the Lord! the spirit of the Lord!" and filling their mouths continually with it, and for this very purpose, that the truly spiritual

Christian, whom he cannot in the same way decoy, may if possible, be made to loathe the very name of Christ in spirit, or "Christ within the hope of glory," this manifestation of the covenant being so continually brought forward and taken in vain by those well known to be antichristians. Hence we see the art and power of the arch-destroyer to contrive and form a deadly weapon with two edges, calculated to cut, to wound, and to kill each way! he fills the mouths of his deluded followers, both with a cry against Christian redemption, and at the same time for it; that is, partly for and partly against, in order to divide Christ; thus also to divide and part asunder his people, and to destroy the one half on his right hand, and the other half on his left!

Then seeing the destroyer has gone forth, let all stand fast: for he has now but dressed up his old trick in a new garb, in order to play it off again upon the unwary, and those who cry peace. He has instigated the Socinian doctrine on the one hand to take captive all that is possible thereby, intending that those who may escape it, shall in their flight for refuge take shelter in the doctrines and opinions of men, in unconditional assurance, or in the flesh without the spirit,—because therefore the Socinian or Hicksite has sinfully denied the divinity and atonement of Christ, shall we unnecessarily and sinfully too, abandon every thing else relative to God's salvation, that so we may establish what they deny? as if it were possible for us to obtain salvation by the one without the other. And will any be driven through cowardice from a practical faith in divine grace, and the light and spirit of the gospel, because these seceders have illusively pretended thereto. Will any man be deterred from reverently naming and believing in the holy name, because the atheist chaunts it off with

scorn? Not the true Christian, no, for if the very worst of men deceptively profess the best of things, that will never occasion the true believer to abandon them, nor if the unfaithful abandon one part of the covenant, professing to support the other, it will never induce the former to reverse it, for in so doing he would be a covenant breaker as much as the other.

Now, in conclusion, I would ask the reader if it is not alike dangerous to man, and dishonourable to God, to deny that Jesus Christ has done any thing for our salvation without us, and to deny that he is doing any thing for us, within us, for the same purpose; seeing that if we reject either of these provisions, we cannot be saved, for we cannot so much as begin a good life, without the application of that great sacrifice of his body, once made for all men. Nor in the second place can we advance a single day of our lives in the Christian way and warfare against sin, without his presence and help continually extended to us. The former was a mighty offering of his own body, a living sacrifice, once made for the reconciliation of man; the latter is a continual extension and operation of his power and spirit, light and grace, perceptibly working in the hearts of men, for their preservation and safe guidance through the whole course of their lives; for however much and long a man may have gone forward by co-operating with the spirit of God in himself, yet he can never witness preservation and a continuance in well doing, but through the power of this grace and spirit of God working in him and with him; and if the declarations of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostle Paul, be correct, man might for want of a continuance herein, sin against the Holy Ghost, and fall from a good state into one, from which it would be impossible even for the atonement itself to restore him.

LETTER V.

ON THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It will be seen by every rational well informed mind, that the comparison of two or more things together does not virtually diminish the real value of either; but affords a ready way of exhibiting, and ascertaining, the equal, or superior, or inferior properties of things differing both in nature and kind, viz.—the good and the evil; and these severally have their degrees; but my present purpose will be answered by a brief recurrence to the good. On this great scale is beheld, even by us, short sighted as we are, a mighty range of vast extent from the lowest to the highest, in the blessed order of God's assignment; for no man hath ever been able to comprehend, or to reach to the higher degrees of the radii of this mighty circle: so that we see there is room for a place and a station for every good thing in the spiritual as well as in the temporal economy, and that without any interference or infringement upon each other. And God standeth above all, and over all, and through all, and is in all, and ordereth all; and in comparison of whom there is no created thing which can be named in the heaven above, or the earth beneath, or under the earth, or even all things put together; they can indeed be no more accounted of, than the drop of the bucket, or than the particles of dust which cleave to the balance.; and this is the

more evinced to us by reflection on his glorious attributes of wisdom and power, justice and mercy, goodness and love, each in itself unbounded in extent; yet in him all are comprehended, each of itself filling all things, yet each clearly distinct; all in harmony, and what is wonderful, all are one, and that one is God, and each of these bears witness to the whole, and God in each records his mighty power, and testifies, and manifests himself in all. He, Jehovah, is seen of angels, but he has also manifested himself unto man; and, which all believers acknowledge, he has not only manifested himself, but also the knowledge of his will, and that too at sundry times and in divers manners.

But as it regards the ways and means by which God, through Jesus Christ, has revealed his will in former times, or at least as respects the adaptation of those ways and means to the minds of men in the present day, there appears to be a great difference of opinion between us as a people, and other professing Christians—and which difference Robert Barclay in his apology for the true Christian divinity, has set forth in a clear, cogent, and scriptural manner. He has in that work answered the great question, whether that principle which contains the light, grace, spirit, and faith of the gospel; or the Bible, is the first and best leader and controller of the Christian's life and practice; and he has fairly made the Bible to decide this question itself. None need do more than simply quote all the passages from the Scriptures which speak in favour of both these positions, and there will certainly be found a great preponderance in favour of the ground taken by our early friends, and taken also by the apostles, in following the directions of our Lord, as to the guidance of his spirit, and its operation upon men's hearts. And I would indeed that all

who may have any doubts on this point—might first read the New Testament carefully through with candour, and an eye to the subject, and then examine Robert Barclay's proposition on the same subject, when the coincidence will be readily seen. But though Robert Barclay has clearly and unanswerably demonstrated this, I would suggest the following queries for the consideration of all inquirers.

1st. Can the Scriptures, or did they ever, save any one without the spirit?

2nd. Is a person called to the work of the ministry by the Scriptures, or by the spirit of Jesus Christ?

3rd. Is a man brought under a concern to go from one place to another to preach the gospel, by the Scriptures, or by the constraining power of the spirit and love of Jesus Christ?

4th. And when he is arrived at the place assigned, and is assembled with the people, is it not the spirit of Christ that truly unfolds the Scriptures, and brings to view the state, of men, either in the words of Scripture, or in some other suitable language?

5th. And when a professed minister preaches in any of our meetings, his doctrines not being repugnant to the letter of the Scriptures, are the elders or others to judge by the Scriptures, or by the spirit of truth, whether his ministry is from the right spring or not?

6th. Did not the Jews think they had eternal life in the Scriptures, and yet would not come unto Christ that they might have life?

Finally, Christ the Lord is the minister and leader of his people, (others as well as ministers) for they do believe the truth of his gracious words, that he *is with them*, and dwelleth in them, and guideth them, and bringeth all things to their remembrance; and they

know him and his words which he so spake in the days of his flesh, to be unequivocal and true, and not feigned words, or vain pretensions. They know too by blessed experience, that their faith in him their leader, is a practical and living principle,—that it is not a mere theory; and they find, this living experience confirmed to them by literal testimonies from the Scriptures. Hence they are enabled livingly to believe the Scriptures, and to assign them their proper place; or rather to allow them to take their own station and allotment in the blessed schedule of God's providence, declaring themselves to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” and that *through faith* they are able to make us wise unto salvation; where too he has also placed them, and where they acknowledge themselves to have been placed. Hereby those who attempt to put them in the place of the immediate and life-giving instruction of the spirit of Christ, are not true and genuine believers, of the full, fair, and irrefragable testimony of the Holy Scriptures, as it relates to the question before us. In making a comparison of the blessed spirit of the gospel with the Scriptures of truth, there is nothing lost to them; for placing it above them is no diminution of their excellency, nor of their character; nor can there be any dishonour brought to the sacred writings, by placing the all manifesting spirit, and light, and grace of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, over, and above them in the rightful order of God's manifestations and provisions for the children of men. Nay! truly, it cannot be derogatory to the Scriptures, nor to any other creature here below, to place the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, the quickening spirit, above them; and it may be presumed that no person who believes in, and is dis-

posed willingly and self-denyingly to wait from time to time, for the coming of the Lord from heaven, the quickening spirit, will be disposed to give the preference to aught which is beneath, the power and the life, the covering and the instruction proceeding from it:—for these know it to be their Alpha and Omega, truly the beginning and the end of all their christian movements; but this would never authorize any one in the least to believe or act contrary to the Scriptures, which are a blessed revelation of the will of God.

If we compare the Scriptures with the writings of our early friends, there will be nothing lost to the latter by placing the former above them, and in the higher sphere of that exalted rank, where they do deservedly, and ever ought to stand, far above all modern writings; in several considerations which are well defined by Robert Barclay.—For as the Scriptures being authentic and true, place themselves below Christ and his blessed Spirit, so the writings of our worthy predecessors being also true, place themselves meekly and modestly, entirely below the holy Scriptures,—a correct position.

Now, therefore, as the Scriptures are true and authentic in word and doctrine, and stand above all other writings, we may fully admit them to be the only outward, fit rule and standard by which all the professors of Christianity may prove and try their doctrines; and more especially, where *that spirit* which trieth the spirits, is not so well known and understood. This outward test being then generally agreed to by all, is a treasure of inestimable value, and the more so, because it instructs them of the purchase of their redemption, and emphatically directs all to the light and grace of God, through the gospel; which are the very things that our forefathers and we as a people have insisted on. But we

see nevertheless, that for want of a perfectly single eye to the light of Christ, some of the doctrines of this perfect standard are misconstrued and differently understood, so that Christendom has become divided into divers denominations, and each of these denominations has a creed, or confession of faith peculiar to itself, and founded, as it is supposed, upon a right understanding of the Scriptures: every individual member therefore of these different sects feels himself bound to believe and support the doctrines of the gospel as understood by his own society: and such is surely his duty, if he believes with all his heart that they are correct. But whenever any member of a religious body sincerely thinks that he has found important errors in the fundamental doctrines of his own people, it then becomes his duty openly and candidly to say to them, "That such and such, being
 "your faith, and such and such mine, I must therefore
 "separate myself from you, my views having become
 "established, and my duty prompting me to open them
 "to you, and before all men, and not knowing but as
 "ye are many and I am but one, that ye are still more
 "correct than I, I am resolved therefore to take no
 "secret measures, nor to use any hidden influence, to
 "draw you unawares into my opinion; knowing as I do,
 "that the purity and integrity of the gospel is such, that
 "no end, however seemingly good, can sanctify any
 "deceptive means to draw votaries to its support."

Candid and Christian was the way taken by our early friends to gather, and establish a society coinciding with their own views; they maintained honest, manly ground, for their object was not a perversion of right principles, but a fair and lucid exhibition of them in the very face of day. Far different were the subtle movements of the seceders from Friends in America; they endeavoured

with all the art and cunning in their power, secretly to gain and to proselyte the unwary, to their new-fangled system of infidelity. How much more honourable to have come out into broad day-light, and proclaimed their views, inviting others to their standard—there might have been honour in such measures, though practised by infidels.

The subject before us my dear friend, is one of deep importance, even the right assignment of the place of the holy Scriptures; when we contemplate the great consequences which await the retaining or abandonment of apostolic ground; the ground taken by our predecessors in profession, and which they supported with regard to the comparative rank of the spirit of Jesus Christ, and the Scriptures; for it would not require much foresight and sagacity to see, that if we as a people, were to change the place of the Scriptures, and exalt them above, and put them in the place of the teaching of the spirit of Christ, that it must inevitably, and that before long, completely overturn and change our ancient faith and practice, concerning both silent worship, and the need there is of a continually renewed qualification in a gospel minister:—two very prominent and important doctrines of the Christian religion. They are indeed the true doctrines of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: and they had been virtually witnessed by the real worshippers and faithful messengers in all the previous ages of the world, who waited, spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The knowledge and true experience of these doctrines had been very much lost, even since the more refulgent dawning of gospel light upon the sons of men, until they were proclaimed, and the true standard was again raised and supported through much pain and suffering

by George Fox and his cotemporaries; and the same doctrines continue to be acknowledged by their successors in faith down to the present day. Yet it is lamentable that these doctrines remain to be peculiar to the society of Friends, and that they only (it is believed) as a body, are found experimentally and livingly to teach and to practice them.

Inasmuch then as men, by silently waiting upon God, may happily attain strength and instruction, so they can do more towards pulling down the strong-holds of sin and satan, therefore his enmity is the more excited, and his cunning the more exercised to allure them from this blessed ground; for finding his attempts to drive them by violence from the truth, to be in vain, he now very insidiously resorts to art and intrigue; he is very plausible with them, seeking if he can, to relax their direct hold upon God, and their dependance singly on him. He asks but small concessions at once, and admits something that shall very nearly resemble the right thing, and yet not be the thing itself, he gives it a good name, alleging its necessity, and extolling its advantages. And however the adversary hates the Holy Scriptures, and would induce men to disbelieve them altogether, still when he cannot effect this purpose, it is like himself, to exalt them in name, even above their right order and true standing, that so he may dishonour Christ; hence he would place the Scriptures instead of, or before the instructions of Christ's spirit, casting a shade of darkness over men's minds, and over the true faith of the gospel, subtilely suggesting the impracticability of a direct leading of the Holy Spirit, and thus inducing ministers to abandon that flesh-paining exercise of waiting for the promise of the Father, and setting them to work, to preach the letter only instead of Christ Jesus in the

demonstration of the spirit, and with power : hence by degrees he would in time, so thoroughly change and remove this holy ground of our standing, that it might finally be abandoned altogether, which must indeed unavoidably be the case if we misplace the Scriptures, (as some other professors do) by putting them as our instructor before the spirit ; then would *our* worship, *our* ministry, and *our* forms, become like theirs !

LETTER VI.

ON PLAINNESS AND SELF-DENIAL.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

MY mind has often been brought into much painful exercise on account of the many departures from the wholesome Christian testimonies of simplicity and plainness : testimonies faithfully upheld by the Society of Friends in its earlier days, and times of its greater purity ; leading to humility and meekness, and to the avoiding of pride and high mindedness. There is no difficulty in ascertaining from whence these testimonies were drawn by our early friends, even from Jesus Christ himself, that great example of meekness and self denial ; and the source too from whence every wholesome admonition, and good and perfect gift are received ; and if through all good conscience we will “observe whatsoever he commandeth us, even to follow him ;” and what the apostles preached and observed

also, we shall find it needful to make a stand against the insidious pursuits of vanity, and a worldly spirit, and a nurturing of the will of the flesh. The apostle declared that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation," teacheth (also) the "denying of ungodliness and the world's lusts," and this truth, with the declarations of Christ himself, to wit "if any man will be my disciple let him deny himself and take up his daily cross and follow me," and "take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and low of heart;" and that of coming to be a disciple of Christ and wearing his yoke, brings us to the denying of what another apostle wills, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;" and it is by this practical self-denial that the followers of Christ are distinguished from other people; it is not what men say, or profess, that makes the true distinctive character; for a man may think much, and believe much, and rely much upon the sufferings of Christ upon the cross; and at the same time be an utter enemy to the cross of Christ, as it regards his own practical endurance of it, a thing indispensable to a disciple of Christ: and it is very evident, that there can be no true follower, without possessing so much of the spirit and power of the cross, as will work in him to the mortifying of the deeds of the body; to the sanctifying of the spirit; and to the subjugation of the will of the flesh.

And a good degree of this experience is undoubtedly witnessed by individuals under different denominations; but the Society of Friends, from the first, found it needful to adhere to greater purity of manners, than other professors had done, in order to be more perfect followers of his example, as well as of his doctrine of the strait and narrow way which leads to life; believing indeed

the verity and truth of his sayings, and that his doctrines of the cross are unequivocal; and finding by practice too, that the bearing of his cross patiently and honestly, did, in very deed, work to the mortifying of the deeds of the flesh; hence as a people we have seen more clearly than others the necessity of “always bearing about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jésus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” “For we which live, are alway delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 2 Cor. c. 4, v. 10 & 11.”

Whatever then may be the practices or sayings of others, we feel bound faithfully to adhere to the commands and doctrines of Christ and his apostles as recorded in holy writ, as well as to the word of God’s grace in our hearts, to the denying of all desires after the maxims and manners, fashions and customs of this vain world. And as this was a subject not unworthy of the Son of God, and his apostles, in his and their preaching and personal simplicity; none will do well in charging his more scrupulous followers with narrow mindedness, because of their conformity to the doctrine and practice of Christ and his apostles; seeing that every one of his disciples should conscientiously keep his commandments, and follow his example of meekness and humility. Nor let any one be deterred from the practice of a self denying life, because he may sometimes see traditional or hypocritical professors trusting in a form of godliness without the power; for there is not one of the christian virtues, but attempts have been made to counterfeit it: and they also who make such attempts are enemies to the cross of Christ and him crucified, which is the power of God, and wisdom of God, and which also the apostle

told one of the churches, he was resolved only to know amongst them.

There was I think more than one reason why the peculiar and primitive testimonies of plainness were given to, and upheld by the Society of Friends; and first, because they are congenial to the very nature of Christianity in its purest form, and agree better with its other testimonies. And secondly, because if conscientiously maintained, they would serve to exhibit this constant acknowledgment to the world, "I am the Lord's!" And thirdly, because it would be an enclosure round about the tender plants of a rising generation; for by observing these peculiarities in language, manners, and appearance, there would not be that inclination to mix familiarly with others; and this has proved to our beloved youth a great preservation from the corruptions and vanities of the world. In this point of view, the benefit to our society has been incalculable; for though it is not these peculiarities of plainness that cause us to be fruitful, yet by them as an enclosure, the fruit may be kept from being devoured. It is the good soil of the garden, well cultivated, that bringeth forth the fruit, but it is the fenced wall of God's providence round about, that keepeth it from being devoured by the creatures without.

And so far is this testimony from being a burthen or a hardship, it is through the gift of him who helpeth, a choice blessing from his hand, and a blessing too, which if we as a people should begin to despise and lightly esteem, God will in his displeasure perhaps remove from us. Yea, and if the vine which he has planted, when he looked for grapes, should be found bringing forth only wild grapes, he will certainly remove this safe enclosure, and suffer the wild beast to tread it down; and he will

also command the clouds that they should rain no rain upon it.

And as a small leak, if suffered to continue, will sink a ship, however good and richly laden, and as a small breach in the enclosure of the vineyard, however fruitful, will let in the devourer; so I believe if this testimony, (however small any may deem it,) should be abandoned, it would greatly endanger our safety. Yea, and if the boundaries of demarcation between this people and others, as exhibited in our peculiar testimonies, were removed, or suffered to go down through the fear of controversy or of singularity; then should we be prepared to go back, and mingle again with others, and that definite and honourable characteristic by which we have been known and distinguished from all others, would be seen and known no more. Hence I consider it highly important to be ourselves faithful, and to train up, and instruct our families in these christian testimonies, and other doctrines of Christ, by a constant exhibition of this good and comely order and example, as well as by clear, plain argument, and open and full declaration of the hope within us.

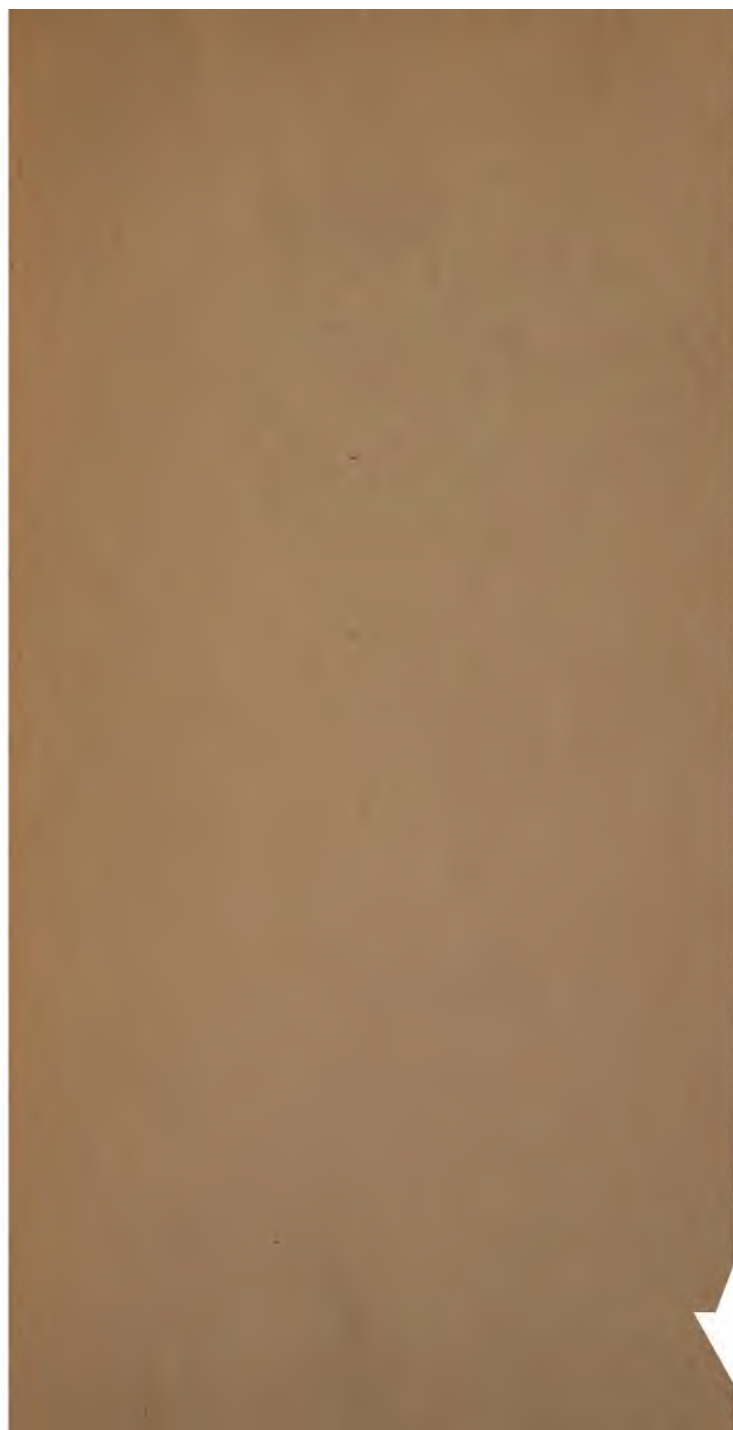
And if the true ground of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour in its primitive purity, as seen by us, cannot be supported *without* controversy, then let it be done in the meekness and wisdom of Jesus *by* controversy; for the cause of the blessed truth is worthy both of controversy, and of a warfare too, under the banners of the Prince of Peace. And to strengthen the minds of any, who might be wavering, we may well refer them to the steady and unabating exercises and advice of the Yearly Meeting in London, for upwards of one hundred and fifty years past; a body which has extended its concern and care over the whole society, for its preservation in the meek-

ness, simplicity, and purity of the gospel, and which, in point of religious knowledge, christian authority, and weight of character, has never been exceeded in the christian world, since its establishment. And now my dear friend, in the conclusion of these letters, I may well say, that they have been written in the feeling of that love which knoweth no bounds; and which hath for its object the true happiness and salvation of all; desiring that as I have written them in simplicity and tenderness of spirit, that thou wouldst permit them to receive a portion of thy consideration.

I feel a fervent solicitude that all may stand fast in the Lord, and hold the profession of their faith without wavering, cleaving to the blessed truth, and submitting to its humbling power; and thankfully receiving every provision of God's providence, which is dispensed to us in common with others, and holding fast too, those which have been in a more peculiar manner mercifully committed to us: as the testimonies and statutes of the Lord were to a people formerly. Then might we not all well say, "*Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar,*" even in the land of Midian, for the crown of his pride must be reduced in Jacob; yea, and it must be brought down in Israel, and again, though Esau be thy brother, and the Lord hath planted him upon his high mountain, and given him a place in the earth, yet Israel must not dwell with him, nor abide there, for he must dwell alone. And behold Moab also, his kinsman, for neither shall he join himself unto Moab, however multiplied his burnt-offerings, and exalted his sacrifices upon his high places: for Israel must abide in his tent, yea, even in his lowly tabernacle a little longer, until the indignation be overpast; for the Lord is his tent and his tabernacle, and

it was he that first led him forth and allotted to him his possessions in the vallies, and as the trees of lign aloes hath he planted him in his garden enclosed, and made him fruitful as by the river side ; and if he will be content to dwell in the land where the Lord his God has planted him, and keep his statutes ; then the Lord will bless him still, in the midst of the nations, and he will cause that no enchantment nor divination shall prevail against him, and so shall he abide as a tabernacle that shall not be taken down. And though many may forsake him and despise him, because he is small, and his dwelling is in a low place, and because the glory of this world shineth not upon the ark of his testimonies, yet let him not be dismayed, the Lord is his light and God his glory ; and he will encamp round about him : and his righteousness shall “ go forth as brightness ” and his “ salvation as a lamp that burneth ! ”









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